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THE SPANISH AMERICANS IN NEW MEXICO.

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THE SPANISH AMERICANS IN NEW MEXICO ARE UNDERGOING GREAT SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE. THEIR VILLAGE CULTURE, FORMED IN ISOLATION NEAR IRRIGATED LAND WHICH HAD REMAINED REMARKABLY STABLE FOR SEVERAL HUNDRED YEARS, IS BREAKING DOWN. THE SPANISH AMERICANS ARE LEAVING THEIR VILLAGES AND MIGRATING TO INDUSTRIAL CENTERS. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THIS ARE--(1) LOSS OF MILLIONS OF ACRES THROUGH LAW SUITS, TAX SALES, AND PRECISE LAND REGISTRATION, (2) DECLINE OF THE SHEEP INDUSTRY, THE TRADITIONAL LIVESTOCK OF THE SPANISH AMERICANS, AND (3) EXPANDING PURCHASE OF LAND BY OUTSIDE INTERESTS FOR SUMMER RANGE AND INCOME TAX WRITE-OFF. THE AUTHOR CALLS FOR STUDIES OF THE SPANISH AMERICAN IN THE PROCESS OF CHANGE TO INDUSTRIALIZATION AND URBANIZATION. (SF)

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THE SPANISH AMERICANS IN NEW MEXICO

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ABSTRACT

The Spanish Americans in this paper are defined as the descendants of early settlers who moved north from Mexico following the reconquest of New Mexico from the Indians by Diego de Vargas in 1692. Isolated for several hundred years from other European settlements, they gradually developed a distinctive culture, drawing from both Indian and Spanish cultural elements.

Living today in villages and settlements grouped within perhaps a 150-mile radius of Santa Fe, they form a compact socio-economic cultural grouping in Southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico distinct in culture,ethnic composition, and language from other Spanish-speaking groups in the United States. It should be emphasized that they are not modern Mexicans. Their ancestors moved into this area long before any substantial number of modern Mexican immigrants flowed into the United States.

The Spanish Americans are not the only ethnic group in New Mexico. Indeed, there are few states that offer such excellent opportunities for research on culture contacts, acculturation and assimilation, and social and cultural changes. Unfortunately these opportunities have remained for the most part in a highly virgin state.

Of the three major ethnic groupings found in the state--the Indian pueblos and tribes, the English-speaking elements, and the Spanish Americans--the Indians have attracted the attention of the largest number of social scientists. As one local Indian remarked, "There have been at times as many anthropologists studying a Pueblo as there were Indians living within it." As a result, considerable hostility, resentment, and secrecy have developed among some Indian pueblos toward students of their culture.

The second ethnic group, the English-speaking people known in New Mexico as "Anglos" have, with the exception of the Ramah Area, been overlooked by sociologists and anthropologists. This is rather unfortunate, as New Mexico contains a large number of diverse English-speaking groups, ranging from such selective communities as Los Alamos with its highly professional population to newly created boom towns founded upon oil or uranium discoveries. There are as well repidly growing cities spreading out in a maze of speculative suburban developments, conservative slow-changing Mormon villages, and towns and villages settled by Texans, Oklahomans, and others from the plains states in relatively new agricultural and ranching settlements.

The Spanish Americans have been the subject of a number of studies by such scholars as George I. Sanchez, Paul A.F. Walter, Jr., Charles P. Loomis, Olen F. Leonard, Lyle Saunders, John H. Burma, and Horacio Ulibarri. Much valuable material on the Spanish American people exists, buried in the files of various Federal departments and agencies active in New Mexico.

Since the majority of these writers did their work a number of years ago, their writings with the exception of an article by Loomis and a monograph by Ulibarri have gradually become dated and are no longer completely descriptive of the peoples or villages studied. Many readers and even students in the

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fields of sociology and anthropology assume that these studies are as valid today as when they were written. Consequently, a totally false impression has developed about the timelessness and static nature of Spanish American villages, institutions, and culture. As a matter of fact, a tremendous momentum in the transition from the traditional Spanish American culture to the Anglo way of life took place immediately after World War II, when the veterans returned from the military services and the shipyard workers came back from the West Coast.

Another problem that should be mentioned is a common tendency to generalize about the Spanish Americans upon the basis of a few village studies and to assume that all Spanish American villages share the same social and cultural patterns. It is the writer's contention that research may well uncover basic differences in the culture and social structure of the villages of the upper Rio Grande Valley, the middle Rio Grande Valley in New Mexico, the northern mountain villages, and the plains villages.

The Spanish Americans brought with them a pattern of village and urban settlement somewhat typical of the Spanish colonizers in many areas of Latin America. A group of settlers would petition the authorities for a grant of land. If the grant was made, each settler received a house and lot in the village, strips of irrigated land along a near-by stream, and the right to graze cattle upon the grant. New settlers were welcome as long as there was available land. When all the land was occupied, the village leaders then petitioned that the grant be closed to further settlement.

Usually the irrigated land within the grant was held in private ownership while the surrounding range and timber lands became the village commons. Besides the village grants, there were many large grants made to individuals, who either developed them as ranches or sold all or part to settlers wishing to establish villages. The boundaries of all grants were quite vague.

These villages--small, self-sufficient, autonomous social cells--grew up wherever irrigated land could be found. Isolated from each other by Indian raids, distances, and extremely poor means of communication and transporation, each village was forced to rely on its own economic and cultural resources. The feeling of sociopsychological distinctness and isolation still persists as a typical characteristic of the more isolated villages of today. The feuding that takes place among the villages today still attests to this fact.

The Spanish American identified himself very closely with his village. As John H. Burma states, "It was impossible to over-emphasize the importance of the home village to the Spanish American. The villages, composed of interrelated extended families, met almost all of the physical, psychological, or social needs of the villagers. The past reluctance, now broken down among the more educated groups of the Spanish Americans, to leave their villages, even at considerable loss to themselves, has been notorious.

Huddled for the first several hundred years within the protecting mountain walls of the central Rio Grande Valley in New Mexico, the Spanish Americans, as population increased and the dangers of Indian attacks lessened in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, moved north into southern Colorado, northeast into the valleys of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, and southeast and east into the Great Plains.

By the end of the nineteenth century virtually every stream in the northern half of New Mesico and southern Colorado was bordered by long strings of villages. Almost every valley of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains contained its cluster of villages. In the plains, villages developed wherever water, irrigable land, or good grazing could be found. As the Spanish Americans adjusted to their diverse geographical and social environments, inevitably cultural differences arose among the villages. Isolation and lack of social and spatial interaction between different areas augmented these differences.

The villages in the Rio Arriba section of northern New Mexico settled by small landholders and neglected somewhat by church and state, evolved a different pattern of existence from that of the more patron-dominated villages of the south and the east. Other villages located along such major trade routes as the Chihuahua and Santa Fe trails diverged from the more isolated mountain villages. The plains villages--open to Indian trade and attack, frequented by American and Canadian trappers, hunters, soldiers, and cowboys--formed different cultural patterns from those of villages farther in the interior.

The villages on or facing the plains seem to have suffered the greatest social disorganization and economic dislocation. Although Congress, within five years after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, confirmed Spanish American rights to five million acres of individual land grants and two million acres of community land grants, the individual land grants by 1930 had shrunk to less than three million acres and the community land grants to around three hundred thousand acres. The ranges and timber lands were first to go. Whenever possible, the Spanish Americans clung to their irrigated land tenaciously.

As a people, the Spanish Americans were utterly unprepared and incapable of securing their land from the attacks of the more competitive, ruthless, and legal-minded Anglo Americans with their newly organized county systems, precise registration of land titles, land taxes, and their rejection of the concept of communal lands. By means of tax sales, fraudulent law suits, and violent acts, the Spanish Americans were deprived of millions of acres. Other large acreages were lost to them through the formation of national forests, land grants to railroads, and the ill-fated homestead act that threw open the public domain to individual homesteads. As these homesteads were gradually abandoned, the land did not revert to the Spanish Americans, but became the property of Anlgo merchants and ranchers.

The Spanish Americans have gradually been driven from the plains of eastern New Mexico, southeastern Colorado, and western Texas and Oklahoma. It is not commonly realized that in the middle of the 19th century Spanish American settlements had spread deep into the plains. Unable to hold their own against the Texas cattlemen, they were gradually forced off the plains toward the irrigated lands along the rivers and toward the mountains and valleys of northern New Mexico. Besides the traditional antipathy of the cattlemen toward sheepherders, there existed a deep-rooted contempt and disdain among English-speaking plainsmen toward the Spanish Americans and their land claims. This retreat of the Spanish Americans from the plains still continues. It can be seen in the areas just south and east of Las Vegas, New Mexico, where a number of villages such as La Liendre, Chaparito, and Trujillo are being squeezed by neighboring Anglo Texan-owned ranches. Deprived of their lands, the village inhabitants are forced to leave.

The movement of the Spanish Americans from the plains toward the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and the Rio Grande Valley has been accelerated in recent years by three factors. One is the continued decline of the sheep industry, the traditional livestock of the Spanish Americans. The second is the expanding purchase of land by Texan commercial, industrial, and professional interests for summer range and for income tax write-off purposes. The land purchased by these interests is usually not worked to capacity. The Spanish Americans once hired on these ranches before the Texans obtained them are frequently replaced by Anglo cowboys. As large acreages pass into Texan hands, usually absentee owners, the population of the neighboring Spanish American villages shrinks rapidly. The third is the growing migration of Spanish Americans from the villages to industrial cities. This process of population replacement of Spanish by Anglos, and of people by cattle in northeastern New Mexico has gone on almost unnoticed by its scholars and political leaders.

Besides the loss of grazing lands, the Spanish Americans in many areas of the Southwest are now threatened by the loss of their water rights and, indirectly of their small irrigated farming plots. The continued rise in urban population, the perhaps wistful desire for unlimited industrial expansion, and the subconscious realization that water supplies are quite limited in the Southwest have set into motion demands by urban Anglo groups that industrial and commercial interests should have precedence over farming and ranching interests. Any change in the present pattern of water distribution would bring about a loss of vital water to the Spanish American farming population in the Rio Grande Valley.

The breakdown of the economy of the rural Spanish American village is forcing larger and larger numbers of villagers to migrate to cities, whether they desire to or not. Although in the past the majority of Spanish Americans lived in rural villages, they are now rapidly becoming an urban population. The majority of rural Spanish American migrants move to cities in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

As they are for the most part unskilled rural workers, they are forced to accept low-paying unskilled employment. This movement to the city, composed of migrants ranging from those fully acculturated to those unacculturated, is intensifying such urban social problems as juvenile delinquency, family breakdown, unemployment, and poverty. This continued urban movement has yet to be studied, and there are many questions that need to be answered by research.

Some of them are as follows: Are the Spanish Americans preserving their identity in the larger cities or are they finding security by becoming an isolated marginal in-group confirming their relationships to within their neighborhoods? Do they preserve a sense of village identity in the city or is this destroyed? What new associations are they forming to meet their needs, and what changes are taking place in the structure and function of the family and the church? Is their traditional attachment to the Roman Catholic Church weakened by urban residence? To what degree do they join other denominations? And, finally, what success are they having in climbing up the social ladder in the socio-economic structure of the cities of the Southwest, the Rocky Mountains, and the Pacific Coast?

In summary, the Spanish Americans are undergoing great social and cultural changes that for the most part are unstudied and unnoticed. They are finally leaving their villages in large numbers and moving to the larger cities. From subsistence farmers they are becoming unskilled urban industrial workers. A culture formed in isolation and remaining remarkably stable for several hundreds of years is finally breaking down under the impact of modern currents of

industrialization, urbanization, Anglo migration, and the loss of traditional ways of making a living. For better or for worse, these Spanish Americans are now plunging into the full flow of modern America. There is much here that cries for study and for analysis, such as cultural and economic changes that are transforming all ethnic groups in the Southwest and in neighboring areas.

Such a study would help us acquire needed knowledge to better understand ethnic groups that are now beginning the process of rapid acculturation in the Southwest, such as Pueblos, Apaches, Navajos, and Mexican Americans. The Spanish Americans are natural groups to study, as they can be found in a continuum of acculturation from the almost unacculturated to the completely acculturated to city life.

FOOTNOTES

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